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SUBJECT: KABILA, KAGAME MEET AUGUST 6 AT BORDER

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Presidents Kabila and Kagame met yesterday, August 6, in the adjoining border cities of Goma/Rubavu (ex-Gisenyi). We do not yet have information on the private meetings between the two heads of state; Kabila and his team are still in Goma where they will meet with Secretary Clinton on August 10. While in public view, however, they reinforced this latest, historic step in the DRC-Rwandan rapprochement with a communique and press conference underlining their commitment to put the past behind them and to cooperate on several fronts. The summit is a sign that the January deal between them is holding and that the still-budding new relationship is more on the track than off. End summary.

¶2. (U) In his first official visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwandan president Paul Kagame took a few steps into Goma at approximately 12:20 pm on August 6, meeting his Congolese counterpart Joseph Kabila at their joint border and proceeding with him to a private meeting at the adjacent Ihuzi Hotel, later expanded to include key Cabinet-level and security personnel. The private meeting lasted about one hour and 20 minutes; the expanded meeting took another 45 minutes or so. The two presidents then held a joint press conference, fielding some barbed questions from the press of both countries. The atmospherics were cordial rather than warm, but both Presidents insisted that it represented a big step forward in their expanding (and now-normalized) relations. Commitments were made to "consolidate" (the Rwandan side's term) security gains and to expand economic relations, though no specifics were announced. It was announced, however, that Kabila had been officially invited to Rwanda, at a date to be determined. Kagame ventured that he in turn hoped to be in Kinshasa sometime very soon. Kagame departed at 5:10 pm. Kabila then walked back into Goma, greeting supporters along the way.

Preliminaries and atmospherics

¶3. (SBU) According to observers in Goma, the summit was prepared in some haste, as an add-on to ministerial-level meetings that had previously been scheduled and that had been ongoing in Rubavu, Rwanda (ex-Gisenyi and adjoining Goma on the border) since Monday. Participants in these had included the foreign, defense, security and energy ministers, and the DRC minister of international and regional cooperation, Raymond Tshibanda. Senior security staff, including Rwandan Army Chief of Staff James Kaberebe; his Congolese counterpart Didier Etumba; and DRC National Police chief John Numbi) were also present. Planning for the summit evolved during the ministerial talks and were only finalized the same of the event. There had been discussions of a visit to Rwanda's methane derrick, but this was dropped, apparently at the request of the DRC side.

¶4. (U) Thanks to the proximity of the Ihuzi Hotel (Goma's most luxurious) to the border, it was possible to arrange for the summit to occur in a very circumscribed area that avoided any contact between President Kagame and the Goma population. Rwandan security had been seen in town over the last few days, and they were very much in evidence in the immediate Ihuzi area, alongside DRC

presidential guard troops. The receiving area was set up on the tarmac apron in front of the DRC "Corniche" customs post. Access from the turnoff to the Ihuzi and the border required screening with Q from the turnoff to the Ihuzi and the border required screening with hand-held metal detectors; further access to the actual reception area required passage through a purpose-built checkpoint complete with metal detectors and an airport-type x-ray machine. This checkpoint was manned by what were clearly Rwandan security personnel in civilian dress. The road from the Ihuzi into town of Goma was completely choked off by a large contingent of the President's PPRD party "animateurs" (praise singers).

15. (U) A long red carpet had been spread in front of the Customs post, and the honor guard and band were arrayed along it. Members of the provincial cabinet and various other dignitaries, plus the few internationals who had shown up despite the absence of invitations, were arrayed as a reception line stretching toward the Ihuzi to a point more or less in front of the U.S. residential compound. A large tent had been set up on the lake shore across from the Customs post; this was used later in the afternoon for a joint press conference.

Photographers capture Kagame bowing to DRC flag

16. (U) President Kagame had been scheduled to arrive at 12:00 noon. President Kabila emerged from the Ihuzi at around 12:05 and began to wait in the street, alone and under a hot sun, with a few officials and security personnel remaining at a respectful distance. At approximately 12:20, a black Range Rover pulled up on the far side of the DRC customs gate, and the unmistakable silhouette of

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President Kagame emerged from it. In total silence, the two presidents moved forward to their respective ends of the long red carpet and stood at attention as the band, deployed between them, played the two national anthems. Kagame then started down the carpet, reviewing the honor guard. With Kabila waiting at his end, Kagame paused and, in a moment heavy with symbolism (indeed, the moment that should be the video clip of the day), gracefully bowed before the DRC flag.

17. (U) The two presidents greeted each other only at Kabila's end of the carpet and then turned to shake hands along the receiving line. Unlike everyone else present, including Kabila, all in suits and ties, Kagame was dressed in a polo shirt and a natty aviator's jacket with the Rwandan flag embroidered on his right arm. With local traditional dancers and drummers providing background entertainment (including "Ntore"-style dancing common to both countries) and with the Presidents leading, the group moved into the Ihuzi Hotel compound. The two presidents disappeared directly into a private conference room while everyone else, including the two sets of ministers and military and security chiefs, ended up in the main auditorium, the two sets of officials arrayed across from each other along each, with only Minister Tshibanda crossing over to sit and chat with Rwandan FM Rose Mary Museminali.

18. (U) The private discussions ran from approximately 12:50 until approximately 1415, when the two groups of ministers were summoned in to join the heads of state. Ministers Tshibanda and Museminali emerged around 2:40, returned to the main auditorium, and read bland statements saluting the progress made at the 3 days of ministerial talks that "had started in Rwanda and ended in Goma" and noting (in Museminali's words) that in the "the matter of security still remains to be consolidated." No questions were taken.

19. (SBU) At approximately 2:50, the two delegations emerged from the private conference hall, and all present, led by the two Presidents, walked back toward the border and into the tent that was the venue of the press conference. This latter was marred by incompetent French-English interpretation (leading to moments when other bystanders jumped in to clarify botched translations and eventually to a dry comment by Kagame to the lead interpreter that "my French is better than yours"), with many key phrases vanishing in both directions. At no point did the two presidents look at or

address each other - all comments were directed at the audience. Minister Tshibanda read the agreed communique in French; after some back and forth, Minister Museminali was excused from reading the English version, which was apparently not ready in time.

¶10. (U) There were three questions each, obviously pre-screened, from the DRC and Rwandan press corps (much to the frustration of the Goma press corps, which was completely upstaged by their national colleagues), and one from the Kigali Reuters correspondent. One question from a Rwandan reporter, about economic matters, was taken and answered by Kagame in Kinyarwanda, with only the briefest of French translations, leaving the largely Congolese audience nonplussed. The other questions came in both French and English, with Kabila responding in the language of the questioner and Kagame in English only.

¶11. (U) The press conference ended at around 4:50 pm. Kagame's Range Rover was waiting outside the tent, and with little further ceremony, he shook hands with Kabila, got in his car and left. Kabila stood watching with crossed arms and a bemused smile as the car pulled away, then turned and led the large group of officials and press in a walk down Goma's main boulevard, from which traffic, but not pedestrians, had been diverted.

¶12. (U) Analysis will follow septel.

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